

In times of "*Make my country great again*" slogans including "*Make America Great Again*," "*Take Back Control*," "*Restore the Past Glory*," and similar nostalgic calls echoing across continents, nostalgia has become a powerful political force. The current global landscape is increasingly shaped by political leaders leveraging yearnings for idealized national pasts and glorious heritage. However, the potential impact of nostalgia can go beyond nostalgic rhetoric and have numerous implications for sociopolitical attitudes. ***How does nostalgia shape our political attitudes and democratic values?*** This naturally occurring question lies at the heart of our project.

From a psychological perspective, nostalgia is a complex, bittersweet emotion involving sentimental longing for individual past (personal nostalgia) or one's group past (collective nostalgia). However, research suggests nostalgia isn't one-dimensional but comes in two distinct forms:

- **Restorative Nostalgia (ResN):** Idealizes the past as perfect, focuses on returning to it, and tends to be more emotional and less analytical, trying to reinstate the past in the present
- **Reflective Nostalgia (RefN):** Appreciates the past while acknowledging its complexities, focuses on learning from history rather than recreating it, reflecting on time passage

Our project investigates how these two types of nostalgia influence political attitudes across eleven countries. Using diverse research methods – including longitudinal studies that track changes in attitudes over time, experiments, and diary studies – we analyze how nostalgia influences:

1. Broader sociopolitical attitudes like populism and polarization
2. Preferences for political leaders with 'strongman' attributes, authoritarian and populist tendencies, and dark personality traits, including, e.g., Machiavellianism, narcissism, and psychopathy

At a time when 72% of the world's population lives in autocracies and democracies face unprecedented challenges (Nord, 2025; Levitsky & Ziblatt, 2018), understanding the psychological factors that make citizens vulnerable or resistant to democratic erosion is crucial.

This is the first comprehensive study examining all forms of nostalgia through a bidimensional lens across diverse political contexts globally. Our findings could help explain why democratic backsliding occurs and potentially how to counter these trends.

The project will deliver important data, contribute to the development of nostalgia theory in socio-political contexts, and result in international collaborations, conference presentations, and scholarly publications. The project implementation will also have a significant social dimension, as the obtained results may serve as a basis for designing effective interventions aimed at countering democratic threats.

Undoubtedly, nostalgia is not a homogeneous phenomenon – and this difference may have fundamental significance for the future of democracy. A crucial question thus emerges: will nostalgia prove to be an integrating force, restoring a sense of shared values, or will it be a threat that undermines the foundations of democratic institutions in favor of an idealized past that perhaps never actually existed?

***Is nostalgia therefore a blessing or a curse for democracies worldwide, or is it both?***